**THE EXPOSITION OF HOLY SCRIPTURE BY ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

**ACTS-026. STEPHEN'S VISION by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God."*

*Acts 7:56*

**I. The vision of the Son of Man, or the abiding manhood of Jesus.**

Stephen's Greek name, and his belonging to the Hellenistic part of the Church, make it probable that he had never seen Jesus during His earthly life. If so, how beautiful that he should thus see and recognise Him! How significant, in any case, is it he should instinctively have taken on his lips that name, the Son of Man, to designate Him whom he saw, through the opened heavens, standing on the right hand of God! We remember that in the same Council-chamber and before the same court, Jesus had lashed the rulers into a paroxysm of fury by declaring, Hereafter ye shall see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of power, and now here is one of His followers, almost, as it were, flinging in their teeth the words which they had called blasphemy, and witnessing that he, at all events, saw their partial fulfilment. They saw only the roof of the chamber, or, if the Council met in the open court of the Temple, the quivering blue of the Syrian sky; but to him the blue was parted, and a brighter light than that of its lustre was flashed upon his inward eye. His words roused them to an even wilder outburst than those of Jesus had set loose, and with yells of fury, and stopping their ears that they might not hear the blasphemy, they flung themselves on him, unresisting, and dragged him to his doom. Their passion is a measure of the preciousness to the Christian consciousness of that which Stephen saw, and said that he saw.

Whatever more the great designation, Son of Man, means, it unmistakably means the embodiment of perfect manhood. Stephen's vision swept into his soul, as on a mighty wave, the fact, overwhelming if it had not been so transcendently strengthening to the sorely bestead prisoner, that the Jesus whom he had trusted unseen, was still the same Jesus that He had been in the days of His flesh, and, with whatever changes, still was found in fashion as a man. He still bent on earth a brother's eye. Whatever He had dropped from Him as He ascended, His manhood had not fallen away, and, whatever changes had taken place in His body so as to fit it for its enthronement in the heavens, all that had knit Him to His humble friends on earth was still His. The bonds that united Him and them had not been snapped by being stretched to span the distance between the Council-chamber and the right hand of God. His sympathy still continued. All that had won their hearts was still in Him, and every tender remembrance of His love and leading was transformed into the assurance of a present possession. He was still the Son of Man.

We are all too apt to feel as if the manhood of Jesus was now but a memory, and, though our creed affirms the contrary, yet our faith has difficulty in realising the full force and blessedness of its affirmations. For the Resurrection and Ascension seem to remove Him from close contact with us, and sometimes we feel as if we stretch out groping fingers into the dark and find no warm human hand to grasp. His exaltation seems to withdraw Him from our brotherhood, and the cloud, though it is a cloud of glory, sometimes seems to hide Him from our sight. The thickening veil of increasing centuries becomes more and more difficult for faith to pierce. What Stephen saw was not for him only but for us all, and its significance becomes more and more precious as we drift further and further away in time from the days of the life of Jesus on earth. More and more do we need to make very visible to ourselves this vision, and to lay on our hearts the strong consolation of gazing steadfastly into heaven and seeing there the Son of Man. So we shall feel that He is all to us that He was to those who companied with Him here. So shall we be more ready to believe that this same Jesus shall so come in like manner as He went, and that till He come, He is knit to us and we to Him, by the bonds of a common manhood.

**II. The vision of the Son of Man at the right hand of God, or the glory of the Man Jesus.**

We will not discuss curious questions which may be asked in connection with Stephen's vision, such as whether the glorified humanity of Jesus implies His special presence in a locality; but will rather try to grasp its bearings on topics more directly related to more important matters than dim speculations on points concerning which confident affirmations are sure to be wrong. Whether the representation implies locality or not, it is clear that the deepest meaning of the expression the right hand of God, is the energy of His unlimited power, and that, therefore, the deepest meaning of the expression to be at His right hand, is wielding the might of the divine Omnipotence. The vision is but the visible confirmation of Jesus' words, All power is given unto Me in heaven and on earth.

It is to be taken into account that Scripture usually represents the Christ as seated at the right hand of God, and that posture, taken in conjunction with that place, indicates the completion of His work, the majestic calm of His repose, like that creative rest, which did not follow the creative work because the Worker was weary, but because He had fulfilled His ideal. God rested because His work was finished, and was very good. So Jesus sits, because He, too, has finished His work on earth. When, and because He had by Himself purged our sins, He sat down on the right hand of God.

Further, that place at the right hand of God certifies that He is the Judge.

Further, it is a blessed vision for His children, as being the sure pledge of their glory.

It is a glorious revelation of the capabilities of sinless human nature.

It makes heaven habitable for us.

I go to prepare a place for you. An emigrant does not feel a stranger in new country, if his elder brother has gone before him, and waits to meet him when he lands. The presence of Jesus makes that dim, heavenly state, which is so hard to imagine, and from which we often feel that even its glories repel, or, at least, do not attract, home to those who love Him. To be where He is, and to be as He is-- that is heaven.

**III. The vision of the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God, or the ever-ready help of the glorified Jesus.**

The divergence of the vision from the usual representation of the attitude of Jesus is not the least precious of its elements. Stephen saw Him standing, as if He had risen to His feet to see His servant's need and was preparing to come to his help.

What a rush of new strength for victorious endurance would flood Stephen's soul as he beheld his Lord thus, as it were, starting to His feet in eagerness to watch and to succour! He looks down from amid the glory, and His calm repose does not involve passive indifference to His servant's sufferings. Into it comes full knowledge of all that they bear for Him, and His rest is not the negation of activity on their behalf, but its intensest energy. Just as one of the Gospels ends with a twofold picture, which at first sight seems to draw a sad distinction between the Lord received up into heaven and set down at the right hand of God, and His servants left below, who went everywhere, preaching the word, but of which the two halves are fused together by the next words, the Lord also working with them, so Stephen's vision brought together the glorified Lord and His servant, and filled the martyr's soul with the fact that He not only worked, but suffered with those who suffered for His sake.

That vision is a transient revelation of an eternal fact. Jesus knows and shares in all that affects His servants. He stands in the attitude to help, and He wields the power of God. He is, as the prophet puts it, the Arm of the Lord, and the cry, Awake, O Arm of the Lord! is never unanswered. He helps His servants by actually directing the course of Providence for their sakes. He helps by wielding the forces of nature on their behalf. He rebukes kings for their sake, saying, Touch not Mine anointed, and do My prophets no harm. He helps by breathing His own life and strength into them. He helps by disclosing to them the vision of Himself. He helps even when, like Stephen, they are apparently left to the murderous hate of their enemies, for what better help could any of His followers get from Him than that He should, as Stephen prayed that He would, receive their spirit, and so give His beloved sleep? Blessed they whose lives are lighted by that Vision, and whose deaths are such a falling on sleep!